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The Genius of Usāmah ibn Munqidh: aspects of Kitāb al-I'tibār by Usāmah ibn Munqidh

by

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PREFACE

This study adduces evidence in support of the following assertions. The Arab conquests of the 1st/7th century affected the development of both the vernacular and the formal mode of Arabic. Rhetorical theory of the 3rd/9th century and after leaves no doubt about the discrete nature of the latter. Modern linguistic theory that tries to do the same for the former is more speculative. Both forms are evident in Kitāb al-I'tibār by the 6th/12th century Syrian writer, Usāmah b. Munqidh. They reflect his long and varied experience as a soldier and man of letters. His use of both of them in Kitāb al-I'tibār is perceptibly matched to his purpose, which is to provide moral instruction by means of illustrative example. This purpose is not immediately apparent in the work, which seems to have begun as a conventional chronicle. The spoken language of the author's time provides the medium for his anecdotage. Formal rhetorical language is used to draw attention to the point of the anecdotes and thus gives structure and coherence to the writer's recollections. His powers as a storyteller are more impressive than his subtlety as a philosopher. The range of his subject matter makes the work of lasting value as a window on the writer's times.

This work is based on the available published work of Usāmah b. Munqidh, as well as relevant rhetorical, literary and historical writing of his time. It also uses published material relating to modern linguistic theory.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This study will consider Kitāb al-I'tibār by the 6th/12th century Syrian writer, Usāmah b. Munqidh, from the point of view of literary skill and style. Literary skill depends on innate ability in the chosen area of operations reflected in the content and form of the literary product. Biographical detail may shed some light on this aspect. Literary style is the writer's more or less conscious application of the intrinsic features of the language in which he writes. The accretion of history may have resulted in new ways of saying something being added to the already existing modes. His choice and use of language may reflect prevailing literary fashion, itself subject to historical influences, as well, of course, as being the expression of his own personality and background. Accordingly, the study will consider certain historical factors influencing the development of the Arabic language until Usāmah's time, and their impact on the conventions of written Arabic. Then, in the light of biographical and historical findings, first the content and form, and then the language of the work, will be examined.

2. THE AUTHOR

A varied life

Both ends of Usāmah's long active life 488-584/1095-1188 were devoted to letters. He recalls how he studied grammar (*nahw*) under Shaykh Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Ṭulaytulī "in grammar the Sībawayhi of his time", after the latter had left the Dār al-'Ilm in Tripoli.[1] This took place in 502/1109 when Usāmah was fourteen. Then, at the end of his life, he taught *badī'*, or the rhetorical science of embellishment, at the Ḥanifī *madrasah* in Damascus 569-79/1174-84.[2] He was celebrated in his time, according to al-Dhahabī, for "knowing by heart more than 20,000 verses of the poetry of the *Jāhiliyyah*".[3] At the same time, he was well known as the author of a *dīwān* of poetry, of which Saladin was especially fond.[4] Al-Dhahabī said of him: "And he was a lion (*usāmah*) like his name (Usāmah), in the strength of his *nathr* ("scattering" or "prose") and his *nazm* ("order" or "verse").

His life as a warrior and hunter was almost as long. In 501/1108, at the age of thirteen, he took part in the defence of Shayzar, the seat of the Banū Munqidh on the Orontes, against Tancred, the Frankish prince of Antioch.[5] From 523-32/1129-38 he was in the army of the Atābak Zankī, and from 538-48/1144-54, while in Egypt at the Fatimid Court, he took part in enterprises against the Franks. During 548-59/1154-64 he was in the army of Nūr al-Dīn Ibn Zankī. He was as celebrated for his prowess on the battlefield as he was for his literary activity : *aḥad abṭāl al-islām*, "one of the heroes of Islam."[6] By his own calculation, he spent seventy years hunting.[7]

His abilities early attracted the envy of others, engendering in him a capacity for survival in times thick with intrigue. He was tested in the first instance by the jealousy of his uncle 'Izz al-Dīn Abū 'l-'Asākir Sulṭān, who had obtained the lordship of Shayzar from his elder brother, Usāmah's father.[8] The anecdote treating of this sinister development is reported by two sources:[9] because of the eminence of the family and Shayzar's strategic importance as a crossing-point on the river,

the quarrel was a cause célèbre. His footwork was further tried during his ten years in Egypt, when he was involved[10] in the murder of al-'Ādil b. al-Sallār by the latter's son-in-law, 'Abbās, and 'Abbās' intrigues against the Caliph al-Ẓāfir.[11] His declining years saw him in and out of favour with patrons, including Saladin, who gave Usāmah the governorship of Beirut, but then grew cold towards him, perhaps because of new information on Usāmah's relationships with the Fatimids in Egypt years before.[12]

Literary output

It was during such fallow periods of disfavour at the end of his life that Usāmah wrote. Some of his production survives, conveying the impression of wide learning. He produced a work on rhetoric, Kitāb al-Badī' fī naqd al-shi'r, (The Book of embellishment in the criticism of verse), consisting of a distillation of previous rhetorical work. The memory of the earthquake of 552/1157, which destroyed Shaizar and killed most of his relatives, prompted an anthology of verse and prose with lament upon ruin as their theme : Kitāb al-Manāzil wa-'l-diyār, (The Book of dwellings and abodes). As curious was another work : Kitāb al-'Aṣā[15] (The Book of the staff), in which the motif of the walking-stick forms a common thread for a collection of anecdotes and verse. The Kitāb Lubāb al-ādāb, (The Quintessence of belles-lettres), is an assemblage of sacred and profane references to a variety of subjects, ranging from wills (waṣāyā) to wisdom (ḥikmah). Titles of works which have been lost[17] include Ta'rīkh al-qilā' wa-'l-ḥuṣūn, (History of palaces and strongholds), and Kitāb al-Nawm wa-'l-aḥlām, (The Book of sleep and dreams), to which Usāmah refers in Kitāb al-I'tibār.[18]

Kitāb al-I'tibār, (The Book of instruction by example) is the author's most famous work, and it was written in Damascus when Usāmah was ninety. He had fled his governorate of Beirut before the arrival of the Franks; Saladin's favour towards him had cooled. In 1880, Hartwig Derenbourg discovered fragments of the work in the Escorial in Madrid, among Arabic manuscripts

relating to Spain and North Africa. He assembled them into order, and discovered that, with the exception of the first twenty-one sheets, the work was complete, up to and including the colophon at the end. His edition[20] of the work was superseded by that of Philip Hitti,[21] upon which this study is based. The copy available to the writer was a 1981 Beirut printing of the 1930 edition. The pagination of either printing, however, does not correspond.

Notes

1 Usāmah ibn Munqidh, 1981, 267
2 Usāmah, 1981, Introduction, fā'
3 Al-Dhahabī in Usāmah, 1893, 103
4 Abū Shāmah, n.d., I, 97-98
5 Al-Dhahabī in Usāmah, 1893, 104
6 Al-Dhahabī in Usāmah, 1893, 103
7 Usāmah, 1981, 289
8 see below p. 12
9 Abū Shāmah, n.d., I, 112; and Ibn al-Athīr, 1876, II, part 2, 199, 200
10 Ibn al-Athīr, 1872, I, 486
11 see below p. 37
12 Usāmah, 1981, Introduction, fā'
13 Usāmah, 1953. Also partly in Usāmah, 1893, 116-146
14 Usāmah, 1965
15 Partly in Usāmah, 1893, 7-50
16 Usāmah, 1935
17 Usāmah, 1981, Introduction, 'ayn
18 Usāmah, 1981, 241
19 Usāmah, 1981, Introduction, fā'
20 Usāmah, 1886
21 Usāmah, 1981

3. THE ARABIC LANGUAGE

'Arabiyyah and the futūḥ

'Arabiyyah, "correct language", or "the language of the Qur'ān", began as a spoken language in Arabia. There is a difference of opinion as to whether it was supra-tribal, or belonged to a particular tribe, as, for example, Quraysh claimed. On the other hand, it is generally agreed that this language, as it evolved, became supra-tribal, dominating the broad division of dialect into Eastern (Gulf) and Western (Ḥijāz).

As a result of the conquests in the 1st/7th century, 'arabiyyah, together with the tribal bedouin dialects among which it was pre-eminent, came into contact with other Semitic languages, which had evolved differently from Arabic. The result was the emergence of modified forms of speech, characterised by simplification of the alien complexities of Arabic. The bedouin tribal dialects, which did not change their fundamental character, influenced, and were in turn influenced by, the non-Arab reaction to Arabic. They were, nevertheless, regarded as exemplifying correct speech.[1] Meanwhile, 'arabiyyah became increasingly isolated, its pure form still evolving, its difficulty protecting it, and reserving for it the role of medium of literary expression for the Arab empire. By the beginning of the 4th/10th century, it had become classic, susceptible of no more development, with an archaic beauty that eclipsed its poor cousins, the bedouin dialects.[2]

Observers noted the symptoms of the process of modification as it happened, without necessarily forming any theory on the basis of their data. In his Kitāb al-bayān wa-'l-tabyīn, al-Jāḥiẓ (163-255/780-869) provides a large number of examples of solecisms (luḥūn) of different sorts, but not in methodical fashion.[3] Likewise, he observed that some sounds of foreign languages could not be rendered into Arabic.[4] Later, al-Muqaddasī (336-80/947-80) in his Kitāb Aḥsān al-taqāsīm fī ma'rifat al-aqālīm, listed peculiarities

of language region by region.[5]

Their observations were carried out from the point of view of *'arabiyyah*, divergences from which were regarded as aberrations. By contrast, a modern observer like Blau regards the forms of speech that emerged from the linguistic encounters of the *futūḥ* as vernacular tongues in their own right. The typological similarity of *'arabiyyah* and the bedouin tribal dialects was based on their being what Blau calls synthetic languages. They tended to express several concepts in a single word, and possessed similar systems of conjugation and declension. The Semitic languages with which they came into contact were what Blau calls analytic : they tended to use one word to express one perception, and were inclined to drop case and word endings, when these had been retained by the synthetic language. The distinct syntactic, morphological and phonetic characteristics which Blau maintains emerged as a result, he calls Middle Arabic. He further sub-divides it according to the communal affiliation of the speaker : Judaeo-Arabic, Christian Arabic and Muslim Arabic. Blau's theory would consider the non-classical Arabic elements of a literary product of northern Syria in the 6th/12th century with a view to classification in the latter category.

The development of *'ilm al-balāghah*

Early orthodox Islamic attitudes discouraged the development of an Arabic science of rhetoric, that is, eloquence and elegance of language. In *Sūrat al-Shu'arā'* (the Poets), Muḥammad is warned against poets : "Those who stray follow them. Do you not see that they wander about love-struck in every valley? And that they preach what they don't practice?"[6] The Prophet is reported to have said : *iyyākum wa-saj' al-kuhhān*, "Avoid ye the rhyming prose of the soothsayers or diviners."[7] Dislike of *saj'* or rhymed prose was based in particular on its being the medium of the utterances of *kahanah* or soothsayers in pre-Islamic times. It was also an indispensable ingredient of any occasion which required eloquence : satirical competition (*muhājāh*), legal

arguments and genealogical claims, for example.[8] On the other hand, the captivating power of this unmetrical poetry was entirely appropriate to the Qur'ān, which was the word of God, quite different from the ecstatic utterances of a diviner : "So announce the praises of God. For by the grace of your Lord, you are neither soothsayer, nor one possessed."[9]

As Islam spread, the threat of the pagan past receded, and rhymed prose reasserted itself.[10] Practical as well as political reasons lay behind a gathering of interest in literary expression. Writing had anyway been a necessary skill among the merchants of the Ḥijāz.[11] It was also essential for correct maintenance of the lists of fighting men in the amṣār and was in time further extended to the administration of conquered territories. The need to assert the cultural superiority of the Arabic language and at the same time to maintain clarity of communication in the official transactions of government, resulted in an art of letter-writing, with the literary secretary (adīb) as the chief practitioner. Thus it is said of 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib (d.132/750), the secretary of the last Umayyad caliph, Marwān II, that "letters began with him."[12] There were other factors which turned the Arabs' attention to the consideration of a science of expression. During the 2nd/8th century poets like Bashshār b. Burd (d.167/783) and Muslim b. al-Walīd, ṣarī' al-ghawānī "smitten by the fair sex" (died 823),[13] began to use rhetorical artifices on an unprecedented scale, and in a way which distinguished their language from that of the older poets. The new use of imagery was regarded as badī', or innovatory, for the way it rejected the subject matter of traditional poetry, which was tied to the desert roots of the Arab, and the pre-Islamic ideal of murū'ah. The direct influence of Greek thought, via the eastern Hellenized cities, on the use of rhetorical devices by exponents of badī', is disputed.[14] Its indirect influence, however, on the establishment of a science of rhetoric, is clearer.[15] Mu'tazilite thought, under the stimulus of the Greek ratiocinative process, challenged the doctrine of the eternal nature of the Qur'ān, and, instead, claimed that it was created. Those who maintained the eternal nature of the Qur'ān, held that its resultant inimitability (i'jāz)

precluded analogy between it and mortal creations. If, however, its inimitability were to be denied, use of a rhetorical device might be justified, if an instance of its use could be pointed to in the Qur'ān.

It was on this basis that Ibn al-Mu'tazz completed his Kitāb al-badī' in 275/888. In it, he sought to show that rhetorical devices of the new style, criticized by the traditionalists, were traceable to the Qur'ān. Five principal devices were isolated : metaphor, alliteration, antithesis, conformity of end with beginning, and order of discourse. Twelve more were added to increase the instructive value of the book.[16]

The practical tendency of the nascent science is a characteristic feature. Arabic literary theory is an ars dicendi, and not a theory of aesthetics, in the same way that Muslim political theory is concerned with the conduct of the ruler and his administration, rather than with the nature of rule.[17] The Kitāb al-Burhān fī wujūh al-bayān of Ibn Wahb, also known as Kitāb Naqd al-nathr and wrongly attributed to Qudāmah b. Ja'far,[18] touches on the question of matching language to occasion. Ibn Wahb distinguishes between a low style sakhīf, and an elevated style (jazl). The former is suited to the intercourse of the educated within the populace, who are incapable of appreciating the elevated style. Popularly based anecdotes and comedies are appropriately cast in sakhīf. On the other hand, among themselves, the educated should employ the elevated style. The psychological and prudential dimensions of language are acknowledged : if one's temporal betters are making grammatical mistakes, chaste language should not be used, lest it show them up. At the same time, for all this innovatory insight, Ibn Wahb adheres to the traditional viewpoint that the best Arabic is spoken by pure bedouins.[19]

Al-Sakkākī (555-626/1160-1229) in his Miftāh al-'ulūm gave to 'ilm al-balāghah the organisation which it was to retain to the present.[20] His work was based on the Asrār al-balāghah and Dalā'il al-i'jāz of al-Jurjānī (d.464/1072). In turn, the third part of al-Sakkākī's Miftāh al-'ulūm was

the basis for the Talkhīṣ al-miftāḥ of al-Qazwīnī (666-739/ 1268-1338).[21] The classification was three-fold : ʿilm al-maʿānī, corresponding to grammar and syntax; ʿilm al-bayān, which deals with simile, metaphor and metonymy ; and ʿilm al-badīʿ, where the word badīʿ which previously alluded to a novelty of style, is now used to denote an effect, that of "embellishment". Since Usāmah wrote a treatise on badīʿ, and lectured in the subject, one might expect to find evidence of its artifices in Kitāb al-Iʿtibār. A copy of Usāmah's Kitāb al-Badīʿ fī naqd al-shiʿr is not available to this writer. In it, one would find Usāmah's own articulation of all the major devices of embellishment, equally applicable in the main to prose as much as to verse. But Usāmah's work was in any case based on previous treatises of rhetoric.[22] We can therefore have recourse for theoretical exegesis to the Talkhīṣ al-miftāḥ of al-Qazwīnī which has an isnād that goes back to Usāmah's time and before.

Notes

1. Blau, 1965, 1-18
2. Fück, 1955, 131
3. Fück, 1955, 102
4. Fück, 1955, 98, 99
5. Fück, 1955, 163
6. The Qurʾān, XXVI:224-227
7. Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī, 1915, Introduction, 8
8. Al-Ḥarīrī, 1867, Introduction, 49
9. Qurʾān, LII:29
10. Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī, 1915, 9
11. Sellheim and Sourdel, 1976
12. Al-Ziriklī, 1954-59, IV, 60
13. Khalafallah, 1958
14. e.g. ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, 1954, Introduction, 3-4; Qudāmah b. Jaʿfar al-Kātib al-Baghdādī 1956, Introduction, 30-44
15. Schaade, 1959
16. Khalafallah, 1958

17. Schaade, 1959
18. Von Grünebaum, 1959
19. Fück, 1955, 123-4
20. Bonebakker, 1960
21. Al-Qazvīnī, 1938
22. Usāmah, 1935, Introduction, 26

4. ASPECTS OF KITĀB AL-I'TIBĀR : CONTENT AND FORM

A conventional beginning

The manuscript of Kitāb al-I'tibār begins at the close of the battle of Qinnasrīn in 531/1137. At this point, the work is in chronicle form and there would seem to be no reason for not assuming that this was also the form of the missing forty-two pages.[1] Events are recorded in the order of their occurrence until soon after the death in 549/1154 of 'Abbās al-Afḍal Rukn al-Dīn, and the capture of his son by the Franks at al-Muwaylih. As Usāmah looks back over his life, it soon becomes clear that small details have stuck in his mind, as well as matters of great historical moment. He describes, for example, the unsuccessful conspiracy organised by the Fatimid caliph al-Ẓāfir in 544/1150[2] against his vizier al-Malik al-'Ādil, Sayf al-Dīn b. al-Sallār. Then follow two depictions of other events in the same day. They both concern fugitives : one is a Sudanese, party to the plot who eludes his pursuers with great energy, hurling himself from the roof of Usāmah's house in Cairo on to a tree in the courtyard. The other is a forger on the run, who enters Usāmah's house by the front door and engages him in erudite conversation. The first shakes his pursuers off; but the second is peremptorily beheaded by al-'Ādil. Before returning to his account of chancellery affairs, Usāmah contemplates the fugitives' different fates.

The incompatability of Usāmah's approach with the conventional chronicle-writing of his era is evident from Abū Shāmah's treatment[3] of Usāmah's account[4] of the killing of al-Ẓāfir by 'Abbās in 549/1154. Abū Shāmah preserves intact Usāmah's account of the butchery, as well as his sombre comment on the day : "one of the most calamitous (ashadd)"[5] he had ever spent. But Abū Shāmah does not include Usāmah's account of an eerie incident, a footnote as it were, to the major event of the day: Amīn al-Mulk, an old watchman, is found dead behind the audience room door, key in hand.[6]

The break between Usāmah and conventional historical writing is soon complete. The account of the death of 'Abbās is followed by the recall of an earlier period, the viziership of Riḍwān Ibn al-Walakhshī, vizier of al-Ẓāfir's predecessor al-Ḥāfiz.[7] Then Usāmah terminates the record with a brief mention of his leaving Egypt and going to Syria to the employ of the Zankid al-Malik al-'Ādil Nūr al-Dīn Maḥmūd b. Zankī. He announces that henceforth he will present wonders ('ajā'ib)[8] which he has witnessed and experienced in combat.

Usāmah as anecdotist

The contrast between the Sudanese's desperate ingress via the tree in Usāmah's courtyard, and the forger's unhurried arrival by conventional means is the first example of a device Usāmah frequently employs in his exposition of "wonders". He has a sure instinct for antithesis which heightens the dramatic effect of an anecdote. It can be more or less picturesque. For example, Usāmah portrays the tableau of his triumphant return after dark bearing a dead lion, to be met by his grandmother full of foreboding about how this will excite the jealousy of his uncle, 'Izz al-Dīn Abū 'l-'Asākir Sulṭān.[9] More emphasis is laid on the antithesis of attitude in the (deathless) encounter between oriental pudeur and western impropriety in the bath-house at al-Ma'arrah. The Frankish knight not only exposes himself ; he does the same for his wife. Sālim the ḥammāmī[10] is too stunned even to take offence.

Usāmah has an eye for circumstantial detail which enhances his credibility as a chronicler. The reader is immediately struck by his care to mention (as well as his ability to remember) the names of the dramatis personae in his yarns : for example, that of the old watchman on the day of al-Ẓāfir's murder. Such details may be graphically described. We are told how the Atābak Ṭughdakīn tucked the ends of his robe into his belt before leaving his tent and wine to go outside and behead Robert of Saône, his prisoner.[11] The reason is at once simple and convincing: were it not for this precaution, the operation would be

impeded. The circumstantial detail may be abstract. An Antiochene Frank offers Abū 'l-Faṯḥ, a craftsman from Shayzar, a cure for his son's scrofula, on condition that Abū 'l-Faṯḥ will not sell the prescription to anyone else.[12] The report of the boy's recovery is the more convincing in the light of the knowledge that the cure is protected by oath from commercial exploitation.

Characterization is used to lend depth to an anecdote. The characters may be historical, as in the case of Saladin, and, indeed, the writer himself, and portrayal of character can be conveyed through dialogue. The exchange between Saladin, who was forty years younger, and Usāmah, concerns a trifling subject : Usāmah's preparedness for battle, and, in particular, the sort of jerkin he wears. The conversation, however, conveys a powerful impression of the older man wavering between self-respect and awe, against the taut unpredictability of the warrior.[13] This is also suggested by means of a narrative, as for example, when Saladin orders a man to be cut in half at the siege of Ḥimṣ for daring to question a decision of his.[14] Other, lesser characters are given life in the pages through a memorable line they are given to utter. The two brothers Banū al-Ru'ān, employed in carrying messages between Shayzar and Latakia, are spared oblivion in this way. "Alright, he's done well, but who's he boasting to now", they say of a man who has just killed a lion, and now seems to be posing motionless for an audience. Once down from the hill where they were hiding, they find that he has been killed by a scorpion in his shoe.[15] He uses pathos to rouse the pity or sadness of the reader. An old woman, whose two sons have been killed in Saladin's siege of the castle of Māsurra in 527/1133 wonders what remains to be inflicted on her.[16] The Franks organise a race at Tiberias between two old women who stumble through to the finish where a prize of a pig, scalded, Usāmah tells us, to remove its hair, awaits the winner.[17]

The ḥikmah of Usāmah

A doxology concludes the description of the two arrivals on the day of the plot against Ibn al-Sallār : "I extol the perfection of the Decreer of Days (muqaddir al-a'mār) and the Appointer of Hours (muwaqqit al-ājāl)."[18] Pre-determination is more closely examined in connection with the fate of Riḍwān.[19] Good qualities mixed in him : rajulan kāmilan karīman shujā'an kātiban 'ārifan.[20] But to no avail : one of his men cuts him down. As a line of Usāmah's verse has it:

"Were it not for what the quills of destiny had
previously written,
The fool would not obtain favour before the wise."[21]

Riḍwān's death, Usāmah says, provides an example (mu'tabar) and a warning (wā'iẓ). But then he adds a caveat : "Were it not for the execution of the divine will,..." (law lā nafādh al-mashī'ah). We must supply the apodosis :"man might be able to take more advantage of such examples."[22] For, the immutability of the divine will takes precedence over any exemplary role it may have. Thus it is not granted to either 'Abbās or his son Nāṣir al-Dīn to take heed of the example of Riḍwān. In addition, they are guilty of tyranny and ingratitude, for which they receive their just deserts.[23]

The relationship of the divine will to God himself is touched on in an observation on miraculous escape. The lord of Afāmiyyah, Sayf al-Dawlah Khalaf b. Mulā'ib al-Ashhabī, was transfixed by a spear because his attendant had failed to dress him properly for combat, but nevertheless, he recovered. Usāmah observes that Sayf al-Dawlah's escape was one of the wonders of the divine will ; the wound, on the other hand, was what God was pleased to cause.[24] The one represents a judgement on carelessness ; the other a limitation on the punishment to be suffered. Usāmah enquires no further into the divine plan and its implementation. Instead, he places his faith in God's eventually bringing matters to a conclusion with due mercy and kindness. As he comments on the loss of his books : "God, praised be He, recompenses according to His mercy and brings things to an end with kindness and

forgiveness."[25] Usāmah's reaction to the inscrutability of God's design takes the form of stoicism : "If fate's vicissitudes overcome my riches, stout patience on my part will defeat it."[26]

Praxis can make little headway against this:

"I cannot avert what God has ordained,
Nor can they do save what is decreed."[27]

Prefacing an account of how a handful of men at Shayzar repulsed an army of Franks, he deprecates the value of organisation and planning in warfare. As his father tells him in connection with the same incident : "My boy, war runs itself." (al-ḥarb tudabbir nafsahā).[28]

And yet, despite these calls to negativism, few lives can have been as full of action as Usāmah's.[29] In Kitāb al-I'tibār, almost as persistent as his reminders of the immutability of fate, are his regrets at old age dampening his zest for life. Old age is a central theme in his thought:

"Oh, you can see how hoariness has dragged you,
Once dusky-templed, weak-sinewed to eventide."[30]

The terms in which he conceives of existence are clearly those of the world of men, rather than the realm of thought. In a discussion[31] with his teacher Ibn al-Munīrah on warfare, the shaykh maintains that courage in battle and reason are mututally exclusive. If the mind considered the dangers to which it was exposed in warfare, it would not fight. Usāmah, by contrast, locates the springs of valour in a man's reasoned concern for his reputation. It does not occur to him that the self-esteem on which his argument depends is ultimately no more explicable in rational terms than is the capacity to court danger which Ibn al-Munīrah assigns to the irrational. Within the limits of psychology, however, his observation is acute, always coloured, of course by his values as chevalier sans peur et sans reproche. During 'Imād al-Dīn Zankī's siege of Ḥiṣn al-Ṣawr in 527/1133 a man from Aleppo called Ibn al-'Arīq behaves with reckless courage. In his preface to the account, Usāmah sees a man as driven by

concern for his name, against the dictates of his fear, to feats in battle. Physical symptoms - shuddering and a change of colour - accompany the struggle in a soul poised for combat.[32]

This behaviour tends to produce attitudes at odds with a determinist view of existence. Usāmah finds that, in spite of the unalterable decrees of fate, resolve can achieve surprising results. The Ismā'īlī fortress of al-Khirbah (al-Khuraybah) was seized single-handedly from 'Īsā al-Ḥājib, governor to Saladin. Usāmah observes that men, once they brace themselves to a purpose, carry it out.[33] On the other hand, audacity should be tempered with prudence. An attempt to capture caravan thieves outside Damascus fails because Usāmah's friend and patron Mu'īn al-Dīn Anar ignores Usāmah's advice to take troops with them. In certain situations, excessive pluck can be disadvantageous.[34] Metaphysical speculation might discount the value of planning in the affairs of men ; but experience finds reason to be a human being's greatest asset. "It is praised by ignorant and intelligent alike." (wa-huwa maḥmūd 'ind al-'āqil wa-'l-jāhil).[35]

Homogeneity and continuity

Usāmah is concerned to pass on the fruits of his experience. His advice may be speculative :

"Beware of the world!
Be deceived not by fleeting life!"[36]

Or it may be more practical :

"Beware of shameless company!
Nothing causes one to repent more than the company of evildoers!"[37]

His instructive purpose lends homogeneity to his presentation, in the way he repeatedly refers the reader to aspects of his experiential philosophy and behavourism. These references often take the form of a doxology. A recurring theme, of course, is the immutability of destiny. Thus, more or less the same formula that concluded the first anecdote in the book,[38] is found again in a comment

on a miraculous escape during the Ismā'īlī attack on Shayzar in 529/1135 : fa-tabāraka Allāh Muqaddir al-aqdār wa-muwaqqit al-ājāl wa-'l-a'mār.[39] The inexplicability of the divine plan calls for another formula. After an anecdote recounting the curing of an eye affliction as the result of a blow received in an engagement,[40] God is praised as the source : "It is possible that you may dislike something which is nevertheless good for you."[41]

Another way of doing this is by means of an epitome. This may concern itself with philosophical speculation, or with human behaviour. It may precede, or follow, the anecdote to which it refers. Usāmah prefaces a story of hopeless courage during a joint attack launched by the Franks and the Atābak Ṭughdakīn in Shayzar in 509/1115 : "If your time is up, neither courage nor strength can help you."[42] An epitome follows the story of the seizure of Ḥiṣn al-Khuraybah : "Men, once they put their minds to something, will do it."[43]

The technique is extended especially to the second group of anecdotes at the end of the book, which deal with the hunt. Although both sections are ostensibly about notable hunters - prominent figures in Syria, Egypt and Iraq in the first, and Usāmah's father in the second - they really concern the behaviour of pursuer and pursued in the animal world, especially trained raptors and their prey. Usāmah epitomizes the point in the same way as he does for the anecdotes illustrating the behaviour of human beings. For example, the attachment of an Arab mare to its rider is contrasted with the unruliness of a birdhawn or hack. Usāmah concludes : "Hacks are more akin to a wild beast than to horses."[44] Fate embraces all living creatures. Prefacing an account of the unexpected deaths of two birds of prey, the writer observes that animals meet their destinies (manāyā) in different ways.[45]

Having forsaken the chronicle form for that of the illustrative anecdote, Usāmah has to find a thread upon which to string his collection, in place of the continuum provided by time. A remarkable memory recalling the events

of a long and varied life, places a good store of tales at his disposal. This means, in the first place, that he can illustrate one point with several anecdotes. It also enables him to follow one anecdote by another which, although sharing some circumstantial detail with the first, illustrates a different point. He can thus change the subject without the reader experiencing too much of a jolt. For example, the account of the siege of Ḥiṣn al-Ṣawr is concerned with the extremes to which a man will go to live up to his reputation.[46] It is followed by the story of another siege by Atābak Zankī, that of Ḥiṣār al-Bāri'ah, illustrating the same point.[47] The next story concerns the investment of Ḥimṣ ; but it is Saladin who is mounting it, and the burden of the story is his cruelty.[48] Usāmah was present at enough such military actions to be able to provide two further examples of the siege as an occasion for Saladin to display his ruthlessness : a place called Māsurra in Kūhistān,[49] and al-Karkhīnī near Irbil in Syria.[50] The effect of a continuum based on the association of ideas is considerable thematic variety in a limited space without prejudice to continuity. This is apparent in the group of stories illustrating remarkable cures.[51] Each anecdote has enough in common with the preceeding one to allow the reader to pass easily from one to another. Thus, anecdotes one and two have accidental eating as their common theme ; anecdotes two and three, vipers; anecdotes three and four, vinegar; anecdotes four and five, the physician Ibn Buṭlān, and so forth. A conversational tempo is lent to this process by Usāmah's frequent use of phrases like "A similar thing which happened to me was", or "Something rather similar happened to me when ...". Sometimes, he apologises for what might be considered an unsuitable illustration : the intrusion of an anecdote concerning a falcon among some examples of unexpected human cures;[52] or too abrupt a change of subject : the progression from the story of Buraykah, a possessed woman, to that of a heroine of the Shayzar camp during an Ismā'īlī attack in 502/1109.[53]

Notes

1. Usāmah, 1895, Introduction
2. Usāmah, 1981, 10
3. Abū Shāmah, n.d., I, 97-98
4. Usāmah, 1981, 25
5. Usāmah, 1981, 27
6. Ibid.
7. Usāmah, 1981, 40
8. Usāmah, 1981, 46
9. Usāmah, 1981, 162
10. Usāmah, 1981, 175
11. Usāmah, 1981, 154
12. Usāmah, 1981, 171, 172
13. Usāmah, 1981, 128
14. Usāmah, 1981, 202
15. Usāmah, 1981, 140
16. Usāmah, 1981, 204
17. Usāmah, 1981, 38
18. Usāmah, 1981, 11
19. Usāmah, 1981, 41-42
20. Usāmah, 1981, 38
21. Usāmah, 1953, 247
22. Usāmah, 1981, 42
23. Usāmah, 1981, 37
24. Usāmah, 1981, 67
25. Usāmah, 1981, 45
26. Usāmah, 1953, 231, S.348
27. Usāmah, 1953, 242, S.379
28. Usāmah, 1981, 190
29. Kīlānī, 1982, 236
30. Usāmah, 1953, 264, S.444
31. Usāmah, 1981, 109, 110
32. Usāmah, 1981, 199
33. Usāmah, 1981, 102
34. Usāmah, 1981, 196
35. Usāmah, 1981, 112

36. Usāmah, 1953, 281, S.481
37. Usāmah, 1953, 237, S.367
38. See above, p.14
39. Usāmah, 1981, 210
40. Usāmah, 1981, 97
41. Qur'ān, II:213
42. Usāmah, 1981, 117
43. See above, p.16
44. Usāmah, 1981, 275
45. Usāmah, 1981, 284
46. See above, p.15
47. Usāmah, 1981, 201
48. See above, p.13
49. Usāmah, 1981, 203
50. Usāmah, 1981, 205
51. Usāmah, 1981, 235-242
52. Usāmah, 1981, 79
53. Usāmah, 1981, 158

5. ASPECTS OF KITĀB AL-I'TIBĀR : LANGUAGE

Classical Arabic (CA) and Middle Arabic (MA)

The language as well as the innovatory[1] form of Kitāb al-I'tibār has attracted attention. Critics have been puzzled by the discrepancy between Usāmah's reputation as a writer of belle-lettres, and the inaccuracies, or at least departures from CA usage, to be found in the text. Nöldeke offers a simple explanation of this : Usāmah was writing as he used to speak. Any inconsistencies in the blend of solecisms and correct usage he lays at the door of the copyist who added his own inaccuracies to the author's.[2] Landberg[3] thought that Usāmah had dictated the work in accurate CA. A copyist was then responsible for the inaccuracies which, nevertheless, reflect the vernacular of the time. It is from the point of view of this last aspect that Schen[4] approaches the question of the language of Kitāb al-I'tibar. As a proponent of the Middle Arabic school of theory, he is concerned to assemble evidence of a taxonomically distinguishable dialect. To appreciate his work fully, it is necessary to have a further look at Blau's theory.

An analytic language assigns one concept to one word. Consequently, the inflexes, which, in a synthetic language, modify and alter the concept of a word, are alien to an analytic language. MA, Blau considers, under the influence of this characteristic, tends to dispense with case endings.[5] Initially, the final vowels of the CA singular, sound feminine plural and the broken plural, were replaced with pausal forms. But this process of eliminating the distinction between endings was extended to case endings whose final vowels were identical, but which evinced differences in the penultimate syllable of the word. The outcome was the retention of only the oblique case in the dual and sound plural. An important consequence of the loss of case endings was the adoption of a more rigid word order, to distinguish clearly between subject and object. The tendency is towards a preverbally situated subject, rather than the CA word order of verb

followed by subject. Another symptom of the need to distinguish the subject of a verb by means other than the suffix of a synthetic language, is the use of separate personal pronouns, before or after the verb of which they are the pronominal subject. From the point of view of the need to distinguish the object, MA shows a tendency to use the preposition, which Blau calls "the true analytic expedient to distinguish objects as against subjects."[6] The disappearance of case endings is matched by the disappearance of mood endings. A consequence of the resultant loss of mood, Blau finds, is the use of the imperfect to express the imperative. Likewise, the negative particle mā, used in CA with the imperfect to denote the present, can be used in MA to negate the future, in place of lan with the subjunctive.[7] An effect of the suppression of both case and mood endings, combined with a phonetic tendency to alter the 'a' sound to 'i', is to submerge the differences between anna, inna and an. The (nominal) subject after anna/inna loses its distinguishing accusative case indicator, and the verb after an, the inflexion which marks it as being in the subjunctive.

In addition to these differences that can be attributed directly to a reduction of inflexion, Blau finds a category of adjustments that reflect part of what he calls "a general drift".[8] It is reflected in MA, as it was much earlier in some aspects of old Semitic languages like Hebrew and Aramaic, while leaving CA unscathed.[9] By contrast with its characteristic, as a synthetic language, of assigning several concepts to one word, CA limits a particular syntactic structure to one particular use.[10] For example, an asyndetical clause in CA must have an indeterminate antecedent ; on the other hand, the relative clause of a determinate antecedent must be introduced by a relative pronoun. MA does not use asyndetical and syndetical relative clauses strictly in regard to the definiteness of the antecedent. The relative pronoun alladhī could thus introduce a clause defining an indeterminate antecedent, and even be used as an indeclinable subordinate conjunction with the meaning of "because".[11] The divergence from CA

syntax was extended in MA to the use of asyndetical co-ordinate clauses, as well as asyndetical subordinate clauses. The CA syntax of the numerals was especially exposed to the effects of the drift. Their apparent anomalies "were not protected by analogy, but often even opposed to it."[12] The CA (and, in this case, unaltered Old Semitic) rule of designating the masculine cardinal numbers 1-10 with the feminine ending, for example, may be reversed, or, at least, inconsistently applied. Morphological consequences of the general drift include the discarding of the CA dual of the substantive, adjective, pronoun and verb, and its replacement by the plural. As a result of the general tendency in Semitic languages to abandon the use of the passive formed by internal vowel changes, and replace it by a reflexive form, the VIIth form replaces the passive first form. The same blurring of sounds which submerges the distinction between inna and anna results in the replacement of the perfect of the IVth form of, in particular, the hollow and the doubled verb, by the first.

These categories, amongst others, were applied by Schen to his examination of the language in Kitāb al-I'tibār.[13] For, although Blau's work is based on Judaeo-Arabic, the various forms of MA - Christian Arabic, Judaeo-Arabic and Muslim Arabic - have many basic features in common.[14]

On the one hand, Schen found a paucity of a number of non-Classical usages which Blau regarded as symptomatic of MA. The particles anna, inna and an remain distinct from one another, "thus confirming the basically CA nature of its sentence structure."[15] The oblique case of the dual instead of the nominative occurs three times ;[16] that of the oblique sound plural in place of the nominative, four times. "It will be noticed how infrequently this typically MA feature occurs."[17] Deviations from the CA occur : sometimes a noun is put in the plural, although the sense indicated the dual; a dual may be followed by a sound plural; a plural pronoun may refer to a dual ;

and the dual may be construed with a plural verb. But Schen points out that, in view of the fact that what he calls "the disintegration of the dual" is so charactertistic of MA, it is remarkable that there are so few divergences from the CA rule regarding the dual.[18] Likewise, there are few non-CA numeral forms, "in a text abounding in numerals."[19] Three examples of the VII[th] form for the internal passive of the first form are noted. As it is characteristic of MA, Schen finds its rarity surprising.[20] The preposition li is found to mark the direct object twice, when this does not precede the verb.[21]

On the other hand, non-CA word order was evident, especially in direct speech. Here, the subject often precedes the verb.[22] Unemphatic separate personal pronouns frequently occur with finite verbs, again especially in direct speech.[23] The verb form ghāra (I) ("raid") recurs for aghāra (IV).[24] Another frequent divergence from CA syntactical usage is the asyndetical clause. Such clauses seem to occur more often in narrative.[25] Asyndetical co-ordinate clauses often follow a verb of motion, with a finite verb of the same person and in the same tense, unconnected by any co-ordinating conjunction. Subordinate asyndetical clauses containing a finite verb follow verbs in the main clause like amara ("order") and arāda ("wish"). In CA, such clauses would be introduced by the particle an, and contain a verb in the subjunctive mood. In addition, Schen finds two asyndetical relative clauses following a determinate antecedent. In CA they would be joined to the main clause by means of a relative pronoun.[26]

Blau sees several justifications for the study of MA beyond mere linguistic study. It can tell us about the cultural setting of the Jews in their Arab environment. The relationship of MA to CA corresponds to that of Aramaic and Hebrew to the Old Semitic language ; MA can therefore shed light on the evolution of Aramaic and Hebrew. As a missing link between Classical Arabic and Modern Arabic dialects, it can tell us about the history of Arabic as

a whole, as well as contribute to the proper understanding of Modern Arabic dialects.[27]

Since the existence of, to borrow Blau's term, Muslim Middle Arabic, is critical to the pursuit of these aims, it follows that it should be distinguishable from other spoken forms of Arabic, as well, of course, as being demonstrably characteristic of the Middle Ages. We are not, however, here concerned with whether this has been done, or is, indeed, even possible, beyond taking note of Schen's own observation, that non-Muslim MA has received the bulk of recent attention.[28] Equally, supposing that there is a Muslim MA, we are not here concerned with whether Schen has conclusively proved that Kitāb al-I'tibār is an example of it. Nevertheless, what Schen has to say about the uneven distribution of non-Classical usages is of interest,[29] not least because the integrity of the concept of Muslim Middle Arabic would seem to depend upon a satisfactory explanation of the phenomenon.

In the first place, he attributes the prevalence of Classical usages to the attentions of a copyist or copyists.[30] But, he adds, the copyist would not have altered the syntax of the sentences. His findings on asyndeta, indeed, accord with this. He goes on to say that the copyist would not have altered non-Classical usages in the dialogue to the same extent as elsewhere,[31] for their inclusion among the utterances of speakers would not detract from Usāmah's literary standing. However, the circumstances, for example, of the old woman's remark to Saladin at Māsurra[32] are at odds with her correct usage of the dual nominative and the dual pronoun. Schen notes it himself.[33] Are we then to understand that this and other unexpected classicisms constitute examples of the copyist's failure to "restrain his well-meant impulse"?[34]

Blau deals with this sort of contradiction more explicitly. He considers that pressure on a writer to conform to the standards of the "language of prestige (Classical Arabic)" causes him to refrain from using

vernacular forms, even where the latter might be more appropriate. Indeed, Blau says, medieval writers go beyond the requirements of Classical Arabic and employ hypercorrect forms.[35] A psychological explanation of this sort, envisaging a tension between considered and instinctive modes of expression, can exist independently of any linguistic theory purporting to identify a discrete mode of speech and then associating it with a particular historical stage.

Likewise, an equally unassuming literary explanation can be accepted, without, again, necessarily endorsing any linguistic theory. Schen's own explanation of the peculiar nature of the language of Kitāb al-I'tibār is partly literary. He is as concerned as Nöldeke or Landberg to explain the prevalence of non-Classical usages in the work, as compared with historical and biographical texts of the same period, especially in view of Usāmah's reputation as a man of letters. He attributes it principally to the character of the material, which places the work outside the recognized categories of literature.[36]

It is within this sort of area, rather than that of linguistic theory, that Blau's identification of points of divergence, and Schen's application of them to the work, produce findings which in some sense accord with what has been said about the content and form of Kitāb al-I'tibār.

The main conclusion drawn by Schen from his noting of the frequent use of asyndeta is that they are evidence of the work having been dictated : "For it is characteristic of spoken language that verbal links between clauses are liable to be dropped."[37] This certainly accords with the continuum of the asssociation of ideas noted above. It has the effect of taking the narrative continually forward. There are hardly any references in the work to what has already been said. This suggests a mind concerned principally with shedding memories, realised most easily through talking. At the same time, as we have seen, it is not an aimless meandering. The anecdotes quickly get to

the point and deliver it succintly. In this connection, two further observations by Schen are significant : that the asyndeta are usually to be found in narrative, and that the asyndetical co-ordinate clauses are usually associated with verbs of motion.[38] The effect of placing verbs together in this way is to reduce in importance any interval between the two actions described. A co-ordinating conjunction, on the other hand, creates a hiatus. To dispense with it is a useful expedient in story-telling, when it is desirable to convey a sense of swiftly unfolding events. For example, in his account of Ibn al-'Arīq's daring at the siege of Ḥiṣn al-Ṣawr, Usāmah says : jā'a rajulun ... ṭala'a fī tilka 'l-thughrah. "A man came ... climbed through that breach."[39] (An asyndetical relative clause interposes between the two verbs, in accordance with Classical Arabic usage when the antecedent is indeterminate, as here.) The advantage of brevity possessed by asyndeta is shared by the subordinate conjunction alladhi. Usāmah uses it when he concludes the account of mistaken identity in battle which nearly ended in tragedy. "I praised God ... because (alladhi) no injury befell him on account of that trust."[40] The origins of alladhi in the relative pronoun are clear from its expanded meaning : "for that which happened whereby" It seems rather similar to the mā al-maṣdarīyah. Hitti equates it with the modern Syrian vernacular illī, meaning "because".[41]

By contrast with co-ordinate asyndeta, subordinate asyndetical clauses occur mainly in direct speech after modal verbs.[42] This presumably reflects spoken practice of the time. Of course, Usāmah's employment of everyday language in direct speech is a necessary component of his anecdotist's skill. For example, in the first group of stories concerning remarkable cures,[43] a guest at a drinking party, suffering from a carbuncle, inadvertently swallows an entire plateful of raw eggs. The host refuses the demand of the other guests that he replace the eggs. Wa-'llāhi mā af'al he says, with the strength

of the Classical Arabic lan af'ala, "I shan't".[44] (There is also omission of the direct object, which Schen finds characteristic of the text : "Such ellipses are only to be expected in a dictated narrative").[45] In view of the sufferer's subsequently being cured of the carbuncle, the adamant refusal has the effect of turning the hungry drinkers' deprivation into a worthwhile and even necessary sacrifice. The refusal thus points the moral. Given the circumstances of its delivery, the host's refusal would not be appropriate in anything but the spoken language of the time, whether or not Usāmah has recalled his exact words. The conclusion that mā plus the imperfect represents the vernacular way of denying the future can be drawn thus on the basis of Usāmah's intention in recounting the anecdote. Another example is less critical to the anecdote in which it occurs, but equally dependent for its (vernacular) meaning on the internal logic of the story. When Usāmah recalls an order he gave to a soldier - tasru' tu'arrif ("Hurry up and inform"),[46] the imperfect in which it is couched must reflect a common usage of the time. Their relative positions and the circumstances preclude its being the polite order or request that Classical Arabic allows in the imperfect. The impression of a routine command is strengthened by the asyndetical linking of the imperatives. At the same time, there are frequent examples of the imperative being used in direct speech.[47] If we are to accept Schen's claim that the copyist would have left the dialogue uncorrected, then these must represent Usāmah wearing his other cap - that of the man of letters.

'Ilm al-badī'

The anecdotist has two main concerns. He needs to depict place and action as convincingly as possible in order to obtain the reader's confidence and as swiftly as possible, in order to maintain his interest. Use of the vernacular

can further both purposes. In the first, it lends verisimilitude to both dialogue and description; in the second, it invests the written word with the natural economy of speech. Usāmah exploits both these qualities in his use of the spoken language of his time. The conscious moralizer, by contrast, is concerned with epitomizing the lessons of experience. What he has to say is axiomatic ; his impact lies, not in what he has to say, but, rather, how he says it. The language becomes an end in itself, the words selected for their memorability as much as for their sense. The anecdotes in Kitāb al-I'tibār are demonstrably harnessed to Usāmah's instructive purpose. Where this is explicitly articulated, then, he is as concerned with the form of the word as with its content. As a theoretician himself of 'ilm al-badī', he was well equipped to employ the science of embellishment in the pronouncement of hikmah.[48]

Nöldeke remarked on Usāmah's use of rhymed prose in Kitāb al-I'tibār.[49] Saj' falls within the category of artifices dependent on distinctions of form for their effect - lafzī. "It is," says al-Qazwīnī,[50] "the acting in concert (tawātu') of two clauses (fāṣilatayn) on the basis of a common letter. This is what al-Sakkākī means when he says that it is to prose what rhyme (qāfiyah) is to verse."[51] Among the different forms of saj' he distinguishes muṭarraf (literally "pointed"). In saj' muṭarraf, the symmetry of the two clauses is limited to the syllable or syllables at the end of the last word in either clause, as dictated by the form of the rhyme. The wazn or paradigm of the last word need not be the same. Al-Qazwīnī[52] gives an example of saj' muṭarraf from the Qu'ān, Sūrah LXXI : 13 and 14 :

مَا لَكُمْ لَا تَرْجُونَ لِلَّهِ وَقَارًا وَقَدْ
خَلَقَكُمْ أَطْوَارًا

("What's the matter with you? Why don't you hope for kindness from God? For he has created you, after a variety of stages of existence"). The wazn of the last word of the first fāṣilah is fa'ālan ; that of the second, af'ālan. The basis of saj' in the Qur'ān, of course, meant that its use elsewhere would strike a familiar note. Of the saj' used in Kitāb al-I'tibār, muṭarraf predominates. The epitomes before and after anecdotes are usually couched in saj', as well as being in the "faultless Classical Arabic" which Schen notices.[55] For example, the fates of beasts are neatly summed up in a preface to an anecdote :

ومنايا الحيوان مختلفة الألوان

("of varying hue are the destinies of beasts.")[54] The distinctive style of language complements the other functions of the epitome. As well as being an axiom, it also marks the start of an anecdote.

Another form of saj' distinguished by al-Qazwīnī is saj' mutawāzin (literally "balanced"). The symmetry of the clauses is extended beyond the rhyme to a conformity in measure of the last words of either clause.[55] An early example of this sort of saj' is the premonition of the breaking of the dam at Mārib by Ṭarīfah al-Kāhinah, wife of 'Amr b. 'Āmir Muzayqiyā, the ruler:

ما رأيت مثل اليوم قد أذهب عني النوم
رأيت غيما أبرق وأرعد طويلا ثم أصعق

("I've never seen anything like I saw today. It drove sleep from me. I saw a cloud which sent out bolts of lightening. It produced thunder for a long while, and then struck down.")[56]

The constraint of an identical wazn makes saj' mutawāzin less frequent than muṭarraf in Kitāb al-I'tibār. When it does occur, it makes for a sonorous pause to the

narrative, as in the following instance, when it prefaces the account of an Ismā'īlī attack on Shayzar:[57]

لو صفت القلوب من قدر الذنوب × /و/فوّضت الى
عالم الغروب × علمت أن ركوب أخطار الحروب ×
لا ينقص مدّة الآجال المكتوب ×

("Were hearts to be cleansed of the soil of their sins, and entrusted to him who knows what is to come, they would realise that to court the danger of wars does not shorten the decreed span.")[58]

The doxology which concludes the anecdote is also couched in saj' mutawāzin. It has already been given in transliteration :

فتبارك اللّه مقدّر الأقدار وموقّت الآجال والأعمار

("Blessed is God, the Ordainer of Destinies, and the Appointer of Hours and Days.")

This neatly rounds off the account.

Another rhetorical device Usāmah employs is jinās (akin to the English paronomasia, the playing on words which sound alike). Like saj', it falls within the category of lafzī. Al-Qazwīnī : "It consists of a resemblance in articulation. It is designated complete (tāmm) if the consonants, their number, vowelling and order, are identical. Further, if they are the same part of speech, they are called analagous (mumāthil)".[60] It occurs in Qur'ān : XXX : 55

وَيَوْمَ تَقُومُ السَّاعَةُ يُقْسِمُ الْمُجْرِمُونَ مَا لَبِثُوا
غَيْرَ سَاعَةٍ

("On the day when the Hour of Reckoning will be established, sinners will swear that they haven't tarried for more than a hour.")

The word sā'ah is used in the first instance metonymically and in the second, literally. It is

otherwise one and the same word. Usāmah uses this form of paronomasia (jinās tāmm mumāthil) in a line of his verse which he includes in a passage on old age :

أروح بعد دروع الحرب في حُلَلٍ
من الدبيقي فبؤسا لي وللحُلَلِ

("I go forth in robes of Dabīqī linen, after the armour of war. Woe unto me and weapons!"[61] This pace Hitti, who translates hulal as fabrics in both instances.)[62]
Al-Qazwīnī continues : "But, if the two words are different parts of speech, it is called (as well as complete) fulfilled (mustawfan)." He gives as an example a line from Abū Tammām :

ما مات من كرم الزمان فانّه
يحيى لدى يحيى بن عبد الله

("Whatever the liberality of the time which has perished, it lives on at Yaḥyā b. 'Abd Allāh's.")[63]

Here, while the appearance of the word yaḥyā is the same, in the first instance it is a verb, and in the second a proper name. Usāmah uses jinās tāmm mustawfan in a similar sort of way. He has recounted a story of how a man called Jawād gave a good account of himself during an Ismā'īlī attack on Shayzar.[64] The story concludes with Usāmah's report of Jawād's visible deterioration, when Usāmah visits him some years later in Damascus, where Jawād is now a fodder-dealer. This prompts a reflection on old age which Usāmah prefaces with :

صرت كجواد العلاف لا الجواد المتلاف

("I have become like Jawād the fodder-dealer and not like the generous man (jawād) who spends wastefully.")[65]

This display of verbal dexterity is a statement by the writer that he belongs to the quadrangle, as well as to the market place. At the same time, it carries the reader smoothly across the divide between the two.

Homophony can be exploited to enhance the meaning of words. A sub-category of jinās is created by the use of unidentical words sharing a common root. Al-Qazwīnī gives an example, Qur'an XXX : 43 :

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ الْقَيِّمِ

("Turn towards the true religion.")

The IVth form of the root q-w-m means "set", whereas the adjective qayyim means "true" or "straight". This device is known as al-mulhaq bi-'l-jinās, "that which is attached to paronomasia."[66] Usāmah uses it in a prayer with which he concludes the account of noteworthy cures. He asks for good health during his remaining time, and "mercy and favour when death comes" :[67]

والرحمة والرضوان عند موافاة الوفاة

The employment of wafāh ("death) immediately after muwāfāh ("arrival") constitutes what al-Qazwīnī calls mukarrar or "repeated", the uninterrupted sequence of words containing the elements of paronomasia.[68] Here, the effect of the juxtaposition is to emphasise the mysteriousness of the moment of death.

Employment of rhetorical devices relying for their effect upon distinctions of meaning (ma'nawī) lends itself to the epitomisation of more complex ideas than, for example, the immutability of fate. Usāmah uses the device of mushākalah,[69] a species of zeugma,[70] to point the difference between the usual meaning of a word, and a restricted, figurative use. Al-Qazwīnī gives as an example Qur'ān III : 54 :

وَمَكَرُوا وَمَكَرَ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ خَيْرُ الْمَاكِرِينَ

("The unbelievers schemed, and so did God. And God is the best of schemers.")[71]

Makara has a different meaning when used of God, from that when used, perjoratively, of man. The purpose of the device is to inform the audience of the figurative meaning of a word, by contrasting it with the literal meaning. Usāmah uses this device when he touches on the relationship of God and the divine will : [72]

فكانت أسباب السلامة لما جرت بها المشيئة
من العجب والجراح لما قدر الله سبحانه
من العجب

("The reasons for the escape were due to the working of the marvels of destiny ; the wound was because of what God, praise be to Him, had ordained by way of recompense.") [73]

The workings of fate appear as marvels ('ajab) to man. But the causes of things are not hidden from God, so they cannot appear wonderful to him. Consequently, when the word 'ajab is attributed to God, it means his state of being pleased to do something : in this case, the infliction of a wound on the lord of Afāmiyyah in judgement of his attendant's carelessness. [74] The subtlety of the device is appropriate to the fineness of the distinction between the two uses of the word 'ajab.

Antithesis is an essential ingredient of Usāmah's anecdotage. [75] He also employs the rhetorical device of antithesis (mutābaqah or tibāq), [76] in places where he wants to concentrate the mind of the reader on the point at issue. The subtlety of the antithesis used varies with the complexity of the idea concerned. For example, Usāmah prefixes some anecdotes illustrating the contrasts in the human and animal worlds, with a string of five pairs of contrasting adjectives describing the form such contrasts take. [77] These are intended to do no more than convey an idea of the variety of God's creation. The antithesis becomes more complex when phrases are contrasted, a device known as muqābalah or "comparison". As an example, al-Qazwīnī gives IX : 82 :

فَلْيَضْحَكُوا قَلِيلًا وَلْيَبْكُوا كَثِيرًا

("Let them laugh a little, then, let them weep a lot.")[78] The first concept in the first phrase ("laugh") is contrasted with the first concept in the second phrase ("weep"), and likewise the second concepts in either phrase ("a little" and "a lot"). Concluding a story about the exceptional resilience of a young Frankish knight, Usāmah observes :

لا يؤخّر الأجل الاحجام ولا يقدّمه الاقدام

("Drawing back no more postpones fate, than courting hazard advances it.")[79]

The antithesis may be less obvious when a concept is contrasted, not with its precise opposite, but with the cause of the latter.[80] The antithesis is then called sababī or dhū tasabbub. Al-Qazwīnī gives as an example Qur'ān : XLVIII : 29:

مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ أَشِدَّاءُ عَلَى الْكُفَّارِ رُحَمَاءُ بَيْنَهُمْ

("Muḥammad is the Messenger of God. They who are with him are hard on the unbelievers, but compassionate among themselves.")[81] Ashiddā', "severe", is contrasted with ruḥamā', "compassionate", although the precise opposite of the first is the result of the second : alyinā', or "soft". Usāmah uses this sort of antithesis in a pronouncement on man's supineness before fate. Prefacing his thoughts on old age,[82] he says :

ولا يظن ظان أنّ الموت يقدمه ركوب الخطر
ولا يؤخره شدة الحذر

("No one should think that courting dangers will advance death, or that excessive caution will delay it.")[83]

Rukūb al-khaṭar ("the courting of danger") is contrasted with shiddat al-ḥadhr ("excessive caution"). Its exact opposite would be the consequence of excessive caution, that is, iḥjām, or "holding back".

Rhymed prose evokes the Qur'ān principally by means of sound. A device which does the same through meaning is iqtibās or adaptation, whereby familiar turns of phrase from the Qur'ān or ḥadīth are incorporated into prose or verse, but not in direct quotation. Al-Qazwīnī says :"It is that the words contain something from the Qur'ān or ḥadīth, without it being indicated that it is from the Qur'ān or ḥadīth".[84] Thus, introducing the list of contrasting adjectives[85] which are a prelude to anecdotes about differences in the human and animal worlds, Usāmah says :

خلق الله عز وجل خلقه أطوارا

("God, to whom belong might and majesty, has made his creation in different sorts and conditions.")[86]

Here, Qur'ān Sūrah LXXI : 14 has been adapted to Usāmah's requirements. The effect is two fold : first, it forms an immediately familiar (and unanswerable) base from which to proceed with his purpose, which is to show how living creatures differ from one another; secondly, it constitutes a display of credentials, placing the writer firmly within the tradition of Arabic letters. Usāmah can use iqtibās in this way equally of a character in his anecdotes about himself. The first of the stories about holy men is given the stamp of authenticity in this way.[87] "Subsist only on what is lawful", the ascetic al-Baṣrī admonishes the woman who has unwittingly wrapped up some sweets in her dowry certificate, which she believes she has lost.[88]

The use of embellishment in Kitāb al-I'tibār in doxologies, axioms and reflective utterances, is

determined by the internal logic of the book. It is also used in another way which recalls the precarious political life of the time, in which ornate communication could be used to disguise the facts, or appease the powerful.

In the chronicle portion at the beginning of the book, Usāmah couches in saj' a plea he claims to have addressed to 'Abbās al-Afḍal Rukn al-Dīn, to mollify the latter. 'Abbās was angry at his son, Nāṣir al-Dīn, whom he suspected of conspiring with al-Ẓāfir against him. As a result of this address, Usāmah says, "Nāṣir al-Dīn's father left him alone, and his son heeded what I'd told him."[89] The ornateness of the address is perhaps more to conceal what was said between Usāmah and 'Abbās, rather than faithfully to record it. For two sources have Usāmah, less creditably, telling 'Abbās that the caliph was having an unnatural relationship with Nāṣir al-Dīn.[90] This was to provoke the vizier to murder the caliph. For notables, jealous of 'Abbās' power, and Usāmah's closeness to 'Abbās, had turned the caliph against Usāmah.

The possible wrath of a living dictator was perhaps a more immediate problem than uneasy memories of dark events long ago, but a similar strategy was indicated. Usāmah delivers an ornately couched panegyric on Saladin. It follows too close upon the anecdotes about his cruelty for one not to suspect that it is a precaution against being misunderstood.[91]

Notes

1. Brockelmann, 1898, I, 320
2. Nöldeke, 1887, I, 242, and in Schen, 1972
3. Von Landberg, 1888, p.30 in Schen, 1972, 225
4. Schen, 1972 and Schen, 1973
5. Blau, 1965, 78-90
6. Blau, 1965, 81
7. Blau, 1965, 108
8. Blau, 1965, 101-110

9. Fück, 1955, 3
10. Blau, 1965, 91
11. Blau, 1965, 88 n.2
12. Blau, 1965, 101
13. Schen, 1972, 3
14. Schen, 1972, 219
15. Schen, 1973, 93
16. Schen, 1973, 75
17. Schen, 1973, 76
18. Schen, 1973, 73
19. Schen, 1973, 76, 77
20. Schen, 1973, 69
21. Schen, 1973, 86
22. Schen, 1973, 96
23. Schen, 1973, 86
24. Schen, 1973, 67
25. Schen, 1973, 90
26. Schen, 1973, 89-92
27. Blau, 1965, 114-122
28. Schen, 1972, 220
29. Schen, 1972, 224
30. Schen, 1972, 231, 232
31. Schen, 1972, 232
32. See above, p.13
33. Schen, 1972, 221
34. Schen, 1972, 232
35. Blau, 1960, 310
36. Schen, 1972, 222
37. Schen, 1973, 89
38. Schen, 1973, 90
39. See above, p.15
40. Usāmah, 1981, 81
41. Usāmah, 1981, Introduction
42. Schen, 1973, 91
43. Usāmah, 1981, 235-242
44. Usāmah, 1981, 236
45. Schen, 1973, 89
46. Usāmah, 1930, 41

47. e.g. Usāmah, 1981, 128
48. See above, p.2
49. Schen, 1972, 224
50. See above, p.9
51. Al-Qazwīnī, 1938, 359-60
52. Ibid., 360
53. Schen, 1972, 228
54. See above, p.17 and Usāmah, 1981, 284
55. Al-Qazwīnī, 1938, 360
56. Al-Mas'ūdī, 1983, II, 167
57. See above, p.17
58. Usāmah, 1981, 210
59. See above, p.17 and Usāmah, 1981, 210
60. Al-Qazwīnī, 1938, 349-350
61. Usāmah, 1981, 209
62. Usāmah, 1929, 191
63. Al-Qazwīnī, 1938, 350
64. See above, p.17
65. Usāmah, 1981, 207. This does not cover the full meaning of the Arabic; cf. Lane, 1980 sub t-l-f, mitlāf, "a man of courage and liberality, who makes what he takes as spoil, of the property of his enemies, to supply the place of that which he consumes by expenditure to satisfy the claims of his friends".
66. Al-Qazwīnī, 1938, 354
67. Usāmah, 1981, 242
68. Al-Qazwīnī, 1938, 354
69. Al-Qazwīnī, 1938, 321
70. Von Mehren, 1970, 103
71. Al-Qazwīnī, 1938, 321
72. See above, p.p. 14-15
73. Usāmah, 1981, 67
74. Lane, 1980
75. See above, p. 12
76. Al-Qazwīnī, 1938, 310
77. Usāmah, 1981, 134

78. Al-Qazwīnī, 1938, 317
79. Usāmah, 1981, 90
80. Al-Suyūṭī, 'Uqūd al-jumān fī 'l-ma'ānī wa-'l-bayān in Von Mehren, 1970, 103
81 Al-Qazwīnī, 1938, 317
82. See above, p. 32
83. Usāmah, 1981, 211
84. Al-Qazwīnī, 1938, 379
85. See above, p. 34
86. Usāmah, 1981, 134
87. Usāmah, 1981, 221-229
88. Ibid., 222
89. Usāmah, 1981, 24
90. Abū 'l-Fidā', 1872, I, 30; and Ibn al-Athīr, 1872, I, 492
91. See above, p. 18

6. CONCLUSION

It is interesting to compare the minimal obtrusiveness with which Usāmah harnesses sakhīf and jazl to his theme, with other writers' styles. Recourse to jazl might be lacking altogether. Buzurg b. Shahriyār al-Rāmhurmuzī, a mariner from the Persian Gulf, wrote his Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Hind[1] soon after 341/953. The subject of the work - the seafaring of the writer's time - is interesting enough for its unconscious vulgarity to be overlooked. Sakhīf might be deliberately introduced, as al-Ḥarīrī (446-516/1054-1122) does in the thirtieth maqāmah,[2] where he uses the language of the underworld to enhance his picaresque setting. Alternatively, the rhetorical mode could completely dominate a writer's expression, as in the case of the secretary 'Imād al-Dīn al-Kātib (519-97/1125-1201), where the untidiness of war is forced into the elegance of rhyming fawāṣil. 'Imād al-Dīn uses them for a purpose : to convey official information. But rhetoric and, in particular, the artifices of 'ilm al-badī', could become an end in themselves, as at places in the Maqāmāt, where Ḥarīrī carries out orthographic tours de force of ultimately pointless brilliance.

On the one hand, Usāmah was quite aware of the difference between correct and incorrect usage: "One can distinguish in the speech of God's creatures eloquence (balāghah) from inadequacy of expression ('iyy), and correct (faṣāḥah) from incorrect (lakan) usage."[3] On the other hand, he has no interest in correct official form, save in one or two places, where an old wariness stirs.[4] He is not concerned with the use of vernacular language to convey the atmosphere of a particular class of society, although he might use it to encapsulate an occasion or a relationship.[5] His faults of grammar are sins of omission and not commission. The flow of memory will not allow him to stop and correct them. Where he does use jazl, it is to point the moral, which lends form to the content. Overtly, the book's

instructive role is its raison d'être. One wonders, however, whether it might not have been as much a pretext for the old man's rummaging.

At all events the reader is not greatly burdened with metaphysical propositions. Chenery maintains that "uniformity of type is one of the characteristics of Arabic literature".[6] This applies at least to the philosophical content of Kitāb al-I'tibār, if to nothing else. One or two themes are endlessly repeated. But the very meagreness of such fare is in a way responsible for the enduring interest of the book. For all sorts of material from Usāmah's long life, observed with such acuity and recounted so tellingly, can be used to illustrate his simple ḥikmah. It cuts right across the divisions to which less flexible, if more profound, literary forms confine themselves, and in so doing, provides us with a unique picture of the places and times in which he lived.

Notes

1. Buzurg b. Shahriyār al-Rāmhurmuzī, 1883-86
2. Al-Ḥarīrī, 1847-53
3. Usāmah, 1935, 328
4. See above p.37
5. See above p.27-28
6. Al-Ḥarīrī, 1867, 59

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